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ABSTRACT

Questionnaires were sent to principals of the Vancouver secondary schools to determine what opportunities were provided for students to study independently. Summaries of results for each question are given. It was concluded that although well-organized and evaluated study programs are rare and principals are ambivalent about their merit, there is an indication that attempts are being made to provide for individual needs and interests and to generate in students a sense of responsibility for their own learning. See TM 000 970 for a copy of the questionnaire. (MS)

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RESEARCH REPORT

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An Evaluation of Independent Study Programs in the Secondary Schools of Vancouver

April 1, 1971.

E. N. Ellis and A. G. Moodie

Research Report 71-07

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Department of Planning and Evaluation
Board of School Trustees
1595 West 10th Avenue
Vancouver 9, B. C.

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AN EVALUATION OF INDEPENDENT STUDY PROGRAMS IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOLS OF VANCOUVER

The purpose of this survey was to determine what each school was doing to provide opportunities for students to study independently.

A letter (Appendix A) was directed to principals of secondary schools, explaining the project, defining independent study and seeking their assistance in completing a questionnaire (see Appendix B).

Completed questionnaires were received from 17 of the 18 schools and their responses are summarized below. (The principal in the 18th school described the activities in his school in a letter, excerpts from which follow the summary of the responses to the questionnaire. See Appendix C).

2. a) Does your school have an independent study program as defined?

Yes 8 (47%) No 8 (47%) Yes and No 1 (6%)

b) Do students receive credit for independent study programs on their transcripts of marks?

Yes 4 (23%) No 10 (59%) Not applicable 1 (6%)

No response 2 (12%)

c) Who is responsible for these students?

The teacher or teachers, the staff in general, the teacher assigned to Study Hall, and in one instance, "the students themselves".

d) Who evaluates their work?

Student teachers, the teacher sponsor, and in one instance "the students themselves".

3. a) If the answer to question 2 is in the negative but the school has some other type of study program, please describe it.

"Grade 12 students who have a heavy academic program, may have a study block."
"Another independent program involves grade 11 and 12 students who are given 'free' time to use in designated research areas. These are supervised by teachers assigned to the areas."
"Supervised study in certain blocks at grade 11 and 12 levels--academic program. Some non-academic students are given a study period as they reach prescribed level in General Math 11."
"Supervised study periods - Gr. 8 - 1 per calendar week
Gr. 9 - 2 per calendar week
Gr. 10 - 2 per calendar week
Gr. 11 - 2 per calendar week
Gr. 12 - optional study block or library block one or both semesters."

"Independent Study as explicit in the covering letter has been discontinued. However, there are approximately 175 students in Project Self where students, according to experience and ability, participate in various stages of independent work."
"Study block Grades 11 and 12 (Students' Elective)."
"On the recommendation of their counsellor certain Gr. 11 and 12 academic students are permitted to elect a 'remedial tutorial' block. Senior teachers and facilities are available to provide extra 'in-school' help in subjects where difficulties exist. The student may be required to attend such sessions as individual needs indicate."

3. b) Do students receive credit on their transcript of marks for other types of study programs? Please explain

Yes 2 (12%) No 11 (65%) No response 4 (23%)

"Project Self students are evaluated and transcripts are completed."
"Only if it involves service to the school (assisting in science labs or the library)."

c) Who is responsible for these students?

The teachers assigned to study hall supervision, and in one instance, the vice-principal.

d) Is their work evaluated?

Yes 2 (12%) No 7 (41%) Not applicable 1 (6%)

No response 7 (41%) By whom? teacher

4. What are the school's objectives for the study program?

"We have only a few students with study periods. These are:
(1) grade 12 students on academic program who have a heavy program of study.
(2) a very few who have medical excuses from P. E."

"Individual teachers have individual students working on personalized programs, e. g. all maths students may report to Room —— to follow programmed learning packages. There is a teacher on duty in this room to assist any student; the aim is to allow any student to proceed at his own pace."

"To promote independence in the students' development. It is hoped that, with direction, students will be stimulated to greater effort."

"To begin to teach junior students how to use study time under the direction of a teacher. Eventually it may be possible to increase the freedom and scope for all students but this degree of responsibility and desire on the part of the students will have to be demonstrated."

"That the student be given the opportunity to make decisions and be responsible for those decisions; and that during 'study' time the student will enrich his educational experience through independent study, tutorial assistance or informal discussion."

"Greater instructional flexibility for teachers who want it. An alternative to standard evaluation procedures. To provide greater opportunities for community participation. To accommodate the student who does his best work in an informal, individual situation."

"To produce independence in students in pursuing a two to three month specialty not offered by the school."

"To allow senior academic students some time to develop habits of study or use of unscheduled time. The provision of a study block also frees a student from carrying a full course load of 7 subjects and can provide the school with the services of students in their unassigned time."

"To encourage proper and continuous use of the library."

"To provide an opportunity to do homework or study subject material; to relieve pressure of assignments."

"To give students an opportunity to do home assignments, especially some who lead a very full extra-curricular life. Quite frankly, we cannot provide any more electives than we do."

"Review and remedial work on school subjects.
Further vocational training."

"To provide additional individualized instruction of a remedial nature in the five academic departments."

5. Is the study program scheduled on a regular basis?

Yes 14 (82%) No 0 Yes & No 1 (6%) No response 2 (12%)

GRADE 12

6. How many periods in the timetable cycle is the study program scheduled for the typical student in the following grade?

The typical response was one block per cycle, i. e., 5 periods in 40, 3 periods in 24 5 periods in 25, 5 periods in 35.

7. How many study periods in the timetable cycle are under teacher supervision and how many study periods are unsupervised for the typical student in the following grade?

In some schools all of the study periods were under teacher supervision, while in other schools they were completely unsupervised. There tended to be a few

more of the former than the latter. Comments from principals included the following:

"Depends on the needs of the students."
"All study periods are under teacher supervision."
"Grade 12 students are not included in the Self Program this year. The pressure of terminal and scholarship examinations is responsible."

8. What is the total number of students who participate in the study program for the following grade?

The numbers of grade 12 students reported by twelve schools totalled 2,061.

GRADE 11

6. How many periods in the timetable cycle is the study program scheduled for the typical student in the following grade?

Here too, the pattern tended to be one block in each cycle and while there was a marked divergence in the policy of supervision there tended to be more study periods under teacher supervision than not. The total number of students participating in the study program at the Grade 11 level was 1,769 from twelve schools.

GRADES 9 AND 10

Except for one school with a flexible modular schedule where twelve to sixteen modules per cycle of 75 modules were assigned for independent study, the general pattern in these grades was to have two or three periods per cycle. It should be noted that the large majority of schools had no program for independent study below Grade 11. The respondents reported a total of 1,288 Grade 10 students in seven schools and 1,456 Grade 9 students in six schools, participating in independent study programs.

GRADE 8

There is very little in the way of programmed independent study in Grade 8. Two schools reported one study period per cycle under teacher supervision. The total number of participating students was 823 and these were from three schools.

9. Where is the study program usually held? Study Hall 2 (12%) Cafeteria 9 (53%)

Auditorium 2 (12%) Classroom 7 (41%) Library 11 (65%)

Resource Centers 3 (18%) Other places noted were:

Guidance Centre 1 (6%)
A two-room portable 1 (6%)
Satellite Libraries 1 (6%)
An area in the hall 1 (6%)
The Industrial Education shop 1 (6%)
The foyer 1 (6%)

10. Has formal instruction on work study habits and skills been given to students in the study program?

Yes * 12 (70%) No 3 (18%) No response 2 (12%)

* Five of the principals reported that this instruction is provided as part of the guidance program.

11. Have programmed instructional materials been used in the study program?

Yes 6 (35%) No 9 (53%) No response 2 (12%)

12. What materials do the students use in their independent study program? (Please rank in order of frequency, with "1" indicating the highest frequency and "2" the next frequency, etc.).

Textbooks 1.9* (* mean rank)
Reference books 2.2
Teacher prepared materials 2.4
Supplementary textbooks 2.9
Others: The following materials were listed by principals --
community resources
lab equipment
slides, tapes and other audio-visual aids

13. Comments:

"These questions are impossible to answer generally with complete accuracy. Our program is designed to meet the needs of the individual and to change as his needs change. We cannot be certain as to numbers involved as this is also constantly changing."

"Students seem to do best when their topic of study extends over a period of about two months. Longer periods tend to give trouble for checking and maintaining interest. When we had 42 students on the program last year, I would estimate approximately 50% success in students producing something worthwhile in their independent study project. For some it was not at all successful and became either a study period or a wasted period. However, this same wastage would perhaps have occurred if the same students had not been included in the program."

"Our use of unscheduled time cannot be defined as a study program. Below the Grade 11 level, a student may have a semester unscheduled but this would be an exception. We expect the subject teachers to be the main guiding force in supplying m aningful assignments and supervising their completion."

"Students permitted to sign into other areas, i.e. Library, Graphic Arts, Art, Industrial Education, Labs., etc. with teacher's permission.
- even with supervision the study period is not very practical.
- for the majority of students it is a waste of time."

"Independent Study is an integral part of the flexible modular plan."

"In terms of independent study generally, a NIL report would be appropriate for this school."

Summary

From the responses of Principals, the following conclusions may be drawn about independent study programs in the secondary schools of Vancouver:

1. There is a clear indication that attempts are being made to differentiate the instructional program to suit individual needs and interests and to generate in students a sense of responsibility for their own learning.

2. There is considerable variation among schools.

3. The use of unscheduled time by students in some schools can hardly be defined as a "study program". Independent study does not always exist by design; in some cases it is an artifact of timetabling, in others, it serves as a relief for students with heavy academic programs.

4. There are relatively few independent study programs below Grade 11 and almost none below Grade 9.

5. There does not appear to be any systematic scheme for evaluation and students do not generally receive credit for independent study.

6. Principals appear to be ambivalent about the merits of independent study programs.

APPENDIX A

APPENDIX A

DEPARTMENT OF RESEARCH
AND SPECIAL SERVICES

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES
OF SCHOOL DISTRICT NO. 39 (VANCOUVER)

1595 WEST 10TH AVENUE
VANCOUVER 9, B.C.
TELEPHONE: 731-1131

December 8, 1970.

TO PRINCIPALS OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Re: Study Programs

At the request of the Department of Secondary Education, the Research and Standards Division is conducting a survey of study programs among all Vancouver secondary schools. This survey relates to independent study programs (as described below) and other study programs.

For purposes of clarity, an independent study program may be defined as a learning situation which allows students to develop personal competencies through experiences both as individuals and in interaction with others. It is characterized by freedom from constant supervision by a teacher. Independent study emphasizes the individual's role and responsibility in learning.

The survey questionnaire may subsequently be supplemented by interviews with principals, teachers, librarians and students at selected schools.

Please complete the attached questionnaire by December 21 and return it to the Vancouver School Board. Thank you for your kind attention to this request.

Yours sincerely,

A. G. Moodie

A. G. MOODIE,
Coordinator of Research
Studies and Testing.

AGM:dn
Enc.

APPENDIX B

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APPENDIX B

SURVEY OF STUDY PROGRAMS

1. Name of School _____

2. a) Does your school have an independent study program as defined? Yes___ No___

   b) Do students receive credit for independent study programs on their transcripts of marks?

   Yes___ No___ (Please explain)

   c) Who is responsible for these students?

   d) Who evaluates their work?

3. a) If the answer to question 2 is in the negative but the school has some other type of study program, please describe it.

   b) Do students receive credit on their transcript of marks for other types of study programs?

   Yes___ No___ (Please explain)

   c) Who is responsible for these students?

   d) Is their work evaluated? Yes___ No___ By whom?

<u>If you do not have a study program, you need not answer the following questions.</u>

4. What are the school's objectives for the study program?

5. Is the study program scheduled on a regular basis? Yes___ No___

6. How many periods in the timetable cycle is the study program scheduled for the typical student in the following grade?

   Grade 12_____ periods of study per timetable cycle of_____periods.

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APPENDIX B (Continued)

7. How many study periods in the timetable cycle are under teacher supervision and how many study periods are unsupervised for the typical student in the following grade?

Grade 12 _____ study periods under teacher supervision

_____ study periods unsupervised

8. What is the total number of students who participate in the study program for the following grade?

Grade 12 _____ students participate in the study program.

(Answers to questions 6, 7 and 8 are requested for the remaining grades)

Grade 11 _____ periods of study per timetable cycle of _____ periods.

Grade 11 _____ study periods under teacher supervision

_____ study periods unsupervised

Grade 11 _____ students participate in the study program

Grade 10 _____ periods of study per timetable cycle of _____ periods.

Grade 10 _____ study periods under teacher supervision

_____ study periods unsupervised

Grade 10 _____ students participate in the study program

Grade 9 _____ periods of study per timetable cycle of _____ periods.

Grade 9 _____ study periods under teacher supervision

_____ study periods unsupervised

Grade 9 _____ students participate in the study program

Grade 8 _____periods of study per timetable cycle of _____ periods.

Grade 8 _____ study periods under teacher supervision

_____ study periods unsupervised

Grade 8 _____ students participate in the study program

APPENDIX B (Continued)

9. Where is the study program usually held? Study Hall_____ Cafeteria _____

Auditorium_____ Classroom_____ Library_____ Elsewhere (specify)_____

10. Has formal instruction on work study habits and skills been given to students in the study program?

Yes____ No____

11. Have programmed instructional materials been used in the study program?

Yes____ No____

12. What materials do the students use in their independent study program? (Please rank in order of frequency, with "1" indicating the highest frequency and "2" the next frequency, etc.)

Textbooks_____
Supplementary Textbooks_____
Teacher-Prepared Materials_____
Reference Books_____
Others (specify) _____

13. Comments

Date_____, 197__. (signed)_____
(Principal)

APPENDIX C

Excerpts From the Letter From the Principal of the 18th School

"I doubt if what we are doing at _____ strictly meets the specifications for independent study programs as laid down.

We have roughly 8 students who, for a variety of reasons, are tackling individual subjects on an individual basis.

Apart from these individuals, whole classes are doing work within courses on an individual basis, for a unit in some cases, and as a regular part-time thing in others.

SOCIAL STUDIES - History 12:

Students contract for the degree to which they wish to earn credit via independent study, e. g. all students have a minimum of 5 seminar preparations. They are encouraged to undertake more on an individual basis. The average independent study time is just under 20%. Oral evaluation procedures are widely used.

SOCIAL STUDIES 9 AND SOCIAL STUDIES 10

Teachers use similar techniques, confined to one major project as a rule, involving 10% of scheduled time.

Geography 12

As above with these variations: time allotment - up to 30% in second semester

INTEGRATED PROGRAM

75 heterogeneous Grade 11 students, working into an independent program from a structured classroom - centred beginning, 2 teachers involved. This to begin next semester and to involve 2 periods daily.

ENGLISH 11H

One class, 33 students - Grade 11. Emphasis on humour. Students work from a library-prepared bibliography. 20% formal classes as a large group. Teacher interviews 6 students in depth daily for guidance, reporting and evaluation. Individual and group presentations to the whole class. Some structured "Media" involvement.

ENGLISH 12CL

Modelled somewhat on 11H pattern, with greater structure, to begin next semester.

A limited amount of individual study is introduced in all English and Social Studies courses.

MEDIA - involvement on an individual and "pairs" basis is encouraged in the junior grades. There will be 125 projects completed, mostly in pairs, as part of the English program for Grades 8, 9 and 10.

MATHEMATICS - GM 11

To gain greater personal involvement.
To develop student initiative.
To permit individual progress.

SUMMARY

Grade 12: students with some independent study time - English 100
Social Studies 140

Grade 11: English 70
Social Studies 100
Integrated 70

Grades 9 and 10: All students on a limited basis